

Sūrah Takwīr

Central Theme and Relationship with the Preceding Sūrah

This *sūrah* portrays the horrors of the Day of Judgement mentioned in the previous two *sūrahs* – ‘Abas and Nāzi‘āt – by the names *ṭāmmah* and *ṣākhkhah*. The effects of this horror and fright on the heavens and the earth and on the objects between them as well as on the world around man and that within him are portrayed. Such is the potent manner of this portrayal that if a person has a discerning mind he can see all that is today concealed from his eyes but will one day be revealed to him.

The disbelievers of the Quraysh are then addressed and told that they should pay heed to the warnings of the Qur’ān about this day and prepare for it. The Qur’ān is from God and He has revealed it to His Prophet through His most trustworthy and favoured angel. If they are rejecting it by considering it to be the work of poets and soothsayers, then they should remember that they will neither be able to harm God nor His Prophet (sws); this attitude will only lead them to their own doom. A messenger is only responsible to remind people of this day. After this, it is up to people to accept or reject it. They should also remember that only those people will be blessed with the urge to profess faith in this Book who truly value and honour the truth. This is an established practice of God and there can be no change in it.

Analysis of the Sūrah

In the first six verses of the *sūrah*, the circumstances which will arise before the dead are brought back to life are depicted.

Verses (1-3): What will befall the great and grand things of this world like the sun, the moon and the mountains is portrayed.

Verses (4-6): The manner in which each and every thing on this earth will only be concerned about its own self is briefly mentioned. The most cherished and favourite of things will be abandoned. Fearing the tempestuous seas, wild beasts from various forests and burrows will gather together. The lion and the deer will be near one another but except for the common calamity they would be encountering, their sense will register nothing else.

After this, in the next eight verses circumstances which will arise after the dead are brought back to life are portrayed.

Verses (7-14): People will be categorized on the basis of their beliefs and deeds and the innocent and oppressed will be delivered justice; the accounts of people will be unveiled; the heavens will turn red and Hell will be ignited further; Paradise will be brought near those who have become entitled to it and each person will see what he has brought before His Lord.

Verses (15-18): Falling stars and the advent of dawn after night bear witness that the Qur'ān is not of the genre of ludicrous chants of the soothsayers. It has been brought down by a grand angel of God who is regarded very powerful and honourable by Him; all angels obey him and he is very trustworthy and dependable.

Verses (22-26): The rejecters of the Qur'ān are warned that the person who is reciting it out to them is not a mad or frenzied person; he is a messenger of God and a very sensible person; his claim of meeting an angel is based on reality; he has seen that angel in the open horizon; he is not greedy of the unseen; the revelations which come to him are involuntary and are from God. Foolish are the people who regard these revelations to be the discourse of the accursed Satan and are denying the warnings they give.

Verses (27-29): Another warning is sounded to the disbelievers that if they continue with their stubborn behaviour, they will neither be able to harm the Almighty nor His Prophet (sws) and will only call for their own doom. The discourse which is being recited to them is a reminder; it is up to them to benefit from it or not. Neither is it the responsibility of the Prophet (sws) to force it upon them nor is it the practice of God to force them to accept it. Only the hearts of those people will welcome this divine word who have the courage to adopt the right path and this courage will only find roots in those who according to the practice of God are worthy of it.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ (١) وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ (٢) وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ (٣) وَإِذَا الْعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتْ (٤) وَإِذَا الْوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتْ (٥) وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ (٦) وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ (٧) وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ (٨) بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ (٩) وَإِذَا الصُّحُفُ نُشِرَتْ (١٠) وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ كُشِطَتْ (١١) وَإِذَا الْجَحِيمُ سُعِّرَتْ (١٢) وَإِذَا الْجَنَّةُ أُزْلِفَتْ (١٣) عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَا أُخْصِرَتْ (١٤) فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالْخُنُوسِ (١٥) الْجَوَارِي الْكُنُوسِ (١٦) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسْعَسَ (١٧) وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا

تَنَقَّسَ (١٨) إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ (١٩) ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ (٢٠) مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ (٢١) وَمَا صَاحِبُكُمْ بِمَجْنُونٍ (٢٢) وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأُفُقِ الْمُبِينِ (٢٣) وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْعَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ (٢٤) وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ (٢٥) فَأَيْنَ تَذْهَبُونَ (٢٦) إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ (٢٧) لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَسْتَقِيمَ (٢٨) وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٢٩)

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the ever Merciful.

When the sun is wrapped up and the stars are bedimmed; mountains are set in motion and camels ten-month pregnant wander unattended; wild beasts come together and the seas burst forth. (1-6)

When souls are grouped together and the infant girl, who was buried alive is asked for what sin was she slain; when the scrolls of deeds are laid open and the skies are stripped bare; when Hell is set ablaze and Paradise is brought near, then each soul will know what it has brought forward. (7-14)

Therefore, No! I swear by the stars which recede, move forward and then hide and by the night as it retreats and the dawn when it breathes that this is the word brought by a noble messenger. He is endued with great power and held in honour before the Lord of the Throne. He is obeyed and is also very trustworthy. (15-21)

And this companion of yours is not one possessed, and he saw him in the clear horizon and he is not avaricious for the Unseen, and this is not the utterance of an accursed devil. (22-25)

Whither then are you going? This is nothing but a reminder to the people of the world. For he among you who intends to adopt the right path. And you will not intend unless the Lord of the Worlds intends. (26-29)

Explanation

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ¹ (١)

The word **تَكْوِيرٌ** means to “to fold something” or “to tie it up in the form of a bundle.” The expression **كَوَّرَ الْعِمَامَةَ عَلَى رَأْسِهِ** means “he wrapped the turban around his head”.

This is a portrayal of what will happen to the sun – which is the most prominent and majestic object of the skies and in fact of the whole universe: It will cease to be. Obviously, when this happens, the whole world which was lit up by it will become dark and murky. Although even now we experience the sun being veiled from our eyes every day, however, the nature of this concealment is absolutely different; this

1. When the sun is wrapped up.

situation only occurs when we are obstructed from receiving its light. At the advent of the Day of Judgement, on the other hand, the sun will be totally extinguished. Who can imagine the extent of darkness when the sun itself will become dark.

وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ²(٢)

The word *انْكَدَرَتْ* means “to be bedimmed” and “to lose shine”. It is obvious that when the sun will cease to exist, all the bulbs and lanterns which rely on its light will automatically lose their luster.

وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ³(٣)

After the skies, the fate of the most majestic and grand object of the earth – the mountains – is depicted. On the Day of Judgement, these mountains which are deeply set on this earth and which are thought of as eternal and enduring and immovable⁴ will be set in motion. At other places in the Qur’ān, more details are given in this regard: they will fly about like clouds.

وَإِذَا الْعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتْ⁵(٤)

The word *عِشَارٌ* is a plural of *عِشْرَاءَ*. It refers to a ten-month pregnant she-camel.

After a mention of the transient nature of great structures, here is a mention of the fleeting nature of a cherished thing. Such will be the upheaval on that day that no one will be able to think of others and the most favoured and cherished possessions will also have no importance in their eyes.

This verse takes into consideration the taste of the Arabs, who were its foremost addressees: camels were their most prized and valued possessions – most of all, she-camels which were ten-month pregnant and were about to give birth. The owners of such camels would take special care of them. Many of their future desires would depend on them. By citing these much treasured camels as example, the Qur’ān has reminded people who are infatuated by the love of this world of the

2. And the stars are bedimmed;

3. And the mountains are set in motion.

4. It should be kept in consideration that when the rejecters of the Day of Judgement would be warned of this day, they would mockingly inquire if this cataclysm would be able to uproot these mountains.

5. And camels ten-month pregnant wander untended.

Hereafter: such will be the horror of that day that the awe of its first phase will make people unconcerned of their very prized possessions: pregnant camels will be walking about unattended; so involved will be their masters in their own selves that they will be oblivious of their most cherished of possessions. At another place, this aspect is referred to in the following words: (يَوْمَ تَرَوْنَهَا تَذْهَلُ كُلُّ مُرْضِعَةٍ عَمَّا أَرْضَعَتْ (22:2)) (when that day comes, every suckling mother shall forget her infant, (22:2)). The only difference is that here the horror of that day is communicated through the insignificance of a prized possession and in 22:2 through the death of maternal love even though so potent is the force of this love that the greatest calamity of this world cannot subdue it.

وَإِذَا الْوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتْ (٥)⁶

The implication is that even wild beasts will become so concerned of their own fate that forgetting their natural enmities they will gather together in places wherever they expect to find refuge. Such will be the state of wild beasts what to speak of human beings. If a forest is engulfed with fire or if flood water spreads all over, the animals of the forest often herd together in fright on whatever hillock or mounds they can go to in order to confront a common calamity. So horror-stricken are they that goats, lions and wolves stand alongside one another but none of them will realize that its enemy or prey is right beside it. A similar situation will arise in its most dreadful form at the advent of the Day of Judgement. The very next verse shows that seas will cross their boundaries. This all-encompassing upheaval will make wild beasts unconcerned about their surroundings.

وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ (٦)⁷

The word *تَسْجِيرٌ* refers to enflaming a stove by putting in more fuel in it. From here, it broadened in meaning and came to connote the tempestuousness of the seas. It is conventional to refer to seas which get out of control and exceed their boundaries and spread on the land by this word. Another word used to refer to this state of the seas is *تَفْجِيرٌ*. It is used in the succeeding *sūrah*, the counterpart of this *sūrah*: (وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ فَجَرَتْ (٨٢:٣)) (and when the seas burst forth, (82:3)).

The implication is that today these seas are confined in their shores but when the great upheaval of the Day of Judgement takes place, they will

6. And wild beasts come together.

7. And the seas burst forth.

burst out of their boundaries.

وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ (٧)⁸

The scenario depicted earlier relates to the advent of the Day of Judgement. Now in this and the subsequent verses, the situation which will arise after its advent is discussed.

By grouping of the souls is meant the categorization of people on the basis of their faith and deeds. This refers to what is mentioned in Sūrah Wāqī'ah from verse seven: (٧:٥٦) وَكُنْتُمْ أَزْوَاجًا ثَلَاثَةً ([at that time], you shall be divided into three groups, (56:7)) to verse forty four. It is explained there that in this world both the righteous and the wrong-doers live together but this situation will not remain forever; a day will come when people will be grouped on the basis of their faith and deeds. On that day, people whose good deeds will be able to tilt the balance of justice will succeed and become worthy of an eternal kingdom and those who remained indifferent to this in their lives will have to face eternal humiliation and failure. After that, it is mentioned that people will be divided into three broad categories: the *sābiqūn* and *muqarrabūn*, the *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* and the *aṣḥāb al-shimāl* and an explanation of how the Almighty will deal with each of these three. Here, in the verse under discussion, all this is referred to in just a few words. The purpose of this mention is to inform people that this world is a place of trial and test. Here both good and evil are given the freedom to exist; however, after the advent of the Day of Judgement in the new world, the evil-doers will be thrown into Hell and those who pass this test will be blessed with eternal success.

وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ (٨) بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ (٩)⁹

This is a mention of the justice which will take place on that Day of justice. As an example of this justice, the case of the buried alive infant girl is referred to. It is evident from this mention that on that day justice will be meted out to the blameless who were oppressed and tyrannized by their very custodians even though they were absolutely innocent.

The word مَوْءُودَةٌ means “an infant girl who is buried alive”.

In Arabia, in certain uncivilized tribes, a father would bury alive his infant girl. In most cases, the reason for this was the fear of poverty; however, in some cases, overblown honour was also the reason. Since it

8. And when souls are grouped together.

9. And the infant girl, who was buried alive is asked for what sin was she slain.

was the fathers, who had total authority over their children, who would perpetrate this heinous crime, hence there was no possibility of anyone coming to their rescue.

By mentioning the fact that justice will be done to the innocent, the Qur'ān has thrown light on the nature of the Court of Justice set up in the Hereafter: the innocent and the helpless shall be the foremost ones who shall be redressed. They are the ones who could not even plead for mercy in this world before anyone on the oppression they had to suffer from. They will be the first to be called and asked of the sin for which they had been killed. In other words, these callous fathers are severely reprimanded; they are told that if innocent girls are not able to plead against them for this atrocious sin, then they should not think that in the Hereafter too no one will hear their pleadings. On that day, the Almighty Himself will be the claimant of their killing. He will ask these innocent about the crime for which they were murdered. Obviously, the purpose of this question could be that the case of innocent killings which could not be presented in any court of this world will be brought up by the Almighty Himself to His court. Later, He will give His verdict.

¹⁰وَإِذَا الصُّحُفُ تُشْرَتْ^(١٠)

The word *صُحُفٌ* refers to the record of deeds of people and laying them open means that each and every deed will be brought before them. A succeeding verse reads: (٤١:٨١) عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا أَحْضَرَتْ (then each soul will know what it has brought forward, (81:41)).

¹¹وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ كُشِطَتْ^(١١)

The word *كُشِطَتْ* means to take off something from the top of a thing that is covering it. From here, it came to be used for stripping the hide of an animal. This word is a common Arabic word for stripping the hide of a camel. It is a common observation that after stripping the hide of a slaughtered animal, its meat appears red; in other words, here the implication is that the sky will look red. In Sūrah Rahmān, the words are: (٣٧:٥٥) فَكَأَنَّهُ وَرِدَّةٌ كَاللَّهَانِ (it reddens like a rose of stained leather, (55:37)). Here the next verse of this *sūrah* mentions that Hell will be set ablaze which very clearly shows that the redness of the skies will be because of the fact that Hell would be set afire.

10. And when the scrolls of deeds are laid open.

11. And the skies are stripped bare.

وَإِذَا الْجَحِيمُ سُعِّرَتْ¹² (١٢)

The word تَسْعِيرٌ means “to set ablaze” and “to enflame”. The implication is that though Hell has already been prepared for the sinners, yet when the time comes to cast them into it, it will be ignited further and when these sinners will be thrown into it, it will burn even more since they are the most relished fuel for it.

وَإِذَا الْجَنَّةُ أُزْلِفَتْ¹³ (١٣)

The word إِزْلَافٌ means “to bring something near”. Paradise shall be brought near the virtuous who have become worthy of it. It is evident from this that though Paradise too would be ready for the virtuous beforehand, it shall be seen by its worthy companions after people have been categorized on the basis of their deeds. In Sūrah Qāf, it is explained that “bringing near Paradise” does not mean that it will be brought near from a far-off place; it will not be far off; it will be at hand and in spite of being at hand it will be brought even nearer so that it can be presented before its companions to honour them. The words are: وَأُزْلِفَتِ الْجَنَّةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ (and Paradise shall be brought close to the righteous even though it would not be far from them, (50:31))

عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا أَحْضَرَتْ¹⁴ (١٤)

This is a combined sequel of all the “whens” (إِذَا) mentioned in the previous verses. The overall sense being that when all these circumstances will befall, then each soul will come to know what it has brought forward for its Lord. “Knowing” here obviously refers to knowing its fate. The implication is that let them make fun of the Day of Judgement today; they should however remember that that day will come accompanied by a great upheaval and on that day each soul will see what it had prepared for this day and what it did not do even though it should have done it. In the next *sūrah*, which is the counterpart of this *sūrah*, this aspect is elaborated upon in more detail. The words are: عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ (٨٢: ٥) (at that time, every soul will come to know what it has sent forward and what it has left behind, (82:5)).

فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالْخُنَّسِ (١٥) الْجَوَارِي الْكُنَّسِ (١٦) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسْعَسَ (١٧) وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا

12. And when Hell is set ablaze.

13. And Paradise is brought near.

14. Then each soul will know what it has brought forward.

تَنفَسَ (١٨) إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ (١٩)¹⁵

This is a refutation of the false notion which the disbelievers had invented about the Messenger of God and His Book. It was on the basis of this notion that they would try to mislead the commoners and would tell them to not get influenced and overawed by the Qur'ān by regarding it to be from God. When they saw that people were getting influenced by the call of the Prophet (sws) and by his warnings of the Hereafter, they got alarmed because this could make them lose their following. So they tried to hoodwink people by fabricating the notion that neither is this Qur'ān a revelation from God nor is Muḥammad (sws) a Messenger of God. They concocted the notion that like many other soothsayers of their society, he too was a soothsayer and just as these soothsayers are in contact with the jinn who inspire them with secrets of the unseen and unknown world, he too, God forbid, is in contact with some devil who inspires him with such thoughts. He gives these inspirations the name of divine revelation and claims that he is a messenger of God who has been sent to them so that people may obey him; if they do not do so, then they will be punished in this world and in the Hereafter they will have to face the grievous punishment of Hell.

The Qur'ān has refuted this propaganda at various instances. In particular, Sūrah Shu'arā and Sūrah Najm have refuted it in great detail and I have discussed various aspects of it in the explanation of these *sūrahs*. Here too this propaganda is refuted through a new angle. In order to grasp it, one should have a deep understanding of the system of soothsaying and fortune-telling that was prevalent in Arabia in those times.

This had its roots in two things:

Firstly, in their self-claimed astrology, they believed that stars per se could effect happenings. They reckoned some stars to bring good fortune and others bad fortune. Similarly, they had fabricated various superstitions related to their rising and setting, traversing and hiding, ascending and descending. On the basis of these superstitions they would try to fool the masses by making good and evil predictions and in this manner try to impose them with their knowledge of the future. For example, at times they would spread the rumour that because of the opposite rotation of a particular star a great danger is about to befall so that people should consult them to protect themselves from it. The unfortunate who would be deceived by them in this manner would be totally befooled.

15. Therefore, No! I swear by the stars which recede, move forward and then hide and by the night as it retreats and the dawn when it breathes that this is the word brought by a noble messenger.

Secondly, they claimed that they had contacts with the jinn from whom they could receive the news of the unknown and unseen world. I have already explained in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Shu'arā' that when anyone would seek help from them regarding such matters, they would put up a show of meditation and then would present what they claimed to be divine revelation. The words presented would be in the form of flowery rhymed prose which would often be meaningless; however, they would attribute some wavered meanings to it and claim that this revelation was inspired to them by a jinn who was aware of the secrets of the unknown world.

The Qur'ān has severely criticized both these pillars of soothsaying at various places. It has presented the rising and setting of the sun and of the moon and the stars in such a manner that it becomes clear that none of them has any authority per se to influence events and happenings and that none of them is a sign of good or bad fortune; their rising and setting are in the hands of the Almighty. It is He who makes them appear on the horizon whenever He wants to and it is He who makes them disappear at His own will. Thus these heavenly bodies by their very existence show that they are subservient to the Almighty. They come and go at His bidding.

Readers may take a look at the gradual development of the preaching of Abraham mentioned in 6:75-84. It would suffice to explain in this regard the nature of Qur'ānic reasoning and its logical outcome.

Similarly, in order to uproot the second pillar of soothsaying, the Qur'ān has referred to shooting stars and explained that there is absolutely no chance for the jinn to have access to the world beyond. If they try to eavesdrop to hear information from this world, the Almighty has set up a whole system to fend them off. As per this system, the shooting stars are pelted from their turrets at these jinn. Though this subject is discussed at various places in the Qur'ān, it would be worthwhile to take a look at the relevant verses of Sūrah Najm and Sūrah Jinn in order to understand the oaths mentioned in these verses.

After this introduction, let us now deliberate on the words and the implied meanings of these oaths

It is explained at several instances in this *tafsīr* that such oaths are meant to substantiate a claim and it is also explained that the occurrence of the particle of negation *lā* before such oaths is not meant to negate these oaths; it is, in fact, meant to negate the claim of the addressees which is to be refuted by the oath itself.

The word *خَنَّسٌ* is the plural of *خَائِسٌ*. It refers to something which comes forward and then draws away, something which appears and then disappears, something which becomes evident and then hides. This word is used as an adjective for the stars and so common is this usage that at times one does not need to mention the stars, and a mere mention of this

adjective is enough to point to the noun it qualifies. Some lexicographers regard it to connote some specific stars; however, this view is baseless. The adjectives which are mentioned here apply equally to all types of stars whether they are stationery or moving and whether they refer to some specific stars as Saturn or Mercury or some similar ones.

The expression الْجَوَارِي الْكُنَّسِ refers to some more attributes of the stars. The fact that these attributes occur here without any particle of conjunction shows that they all refer to the same noun. It has been explained at various places in this *tafsīr* that when adjectives are mentioned in such a manner, they refer to the same noun.

The word جَوَارِي means “one that traverses” and the word كُنَّسِ is the plural of كَانَسَ. The expression كُنَّسَ الظُّبْيُ means: “the deer hid in its shelter” while كُنَّسَتِ النُّجُومُ means: “the stars traversed their orbits and then hid in their destinations”. The author of the famous Arabic lexicon, *Aqrab al-Mawārid*, has explained that this adjective is common to all types of stars.¹⁶

This oath sworn by the stars is to refute soothsaying and fortune-telling. I have already alluded to earlier that the knowledge boasted by the soothsayers about the unknown and unseen world was based on two things: one, the stars could per se influence events and two, on the baseless notion that there are certain abodes in the heavens in which the jinn are able to hear what is going to happen in future and then deliver this information to these soothsayers. By mentioning these characteristics of the stars, the Qur’ān has refuted both these unfounded views. The fact that they set after rising and disappear after appearing and are so punctual at these instances is a clear evidence to their subservience to some higher authority and to not have any powers per se of effecting events that happen on the earth. Obviously, this higher authority is the all-wise and all-powerful God and hence He is the real Lord and Sanctuary for all and it is He who influences such events in a positive or a negative manner.

In order to negate the second of these views, the Qur’ān has revealed a secret of this universe: it is not that there are abodes of eavesdropping in these stars where the devils sit and snoop around for news of the unknown as is claimed by these foolish people; as a matter of fact, there are turrets and observation posts in the heavens from where these devils are pelted when they try to nose around for such news.

These attributes of the stars are mentioned in the form of oaths and therefore in order to make the discourse very eloquent and effective, there is great brevity in them. However, there are clues within the words

16. Sa’īd al-Khūrī al-Shartūnī, *Aqrab al-Mawārid fī Fuṣaḥī al-‘Arabiyyah wa al-Shawārid*. 1st ed., vol. 4 (Tehrān: Dār al-uswah, 1416 AH), 594.

which are enough to guide a person who deliberates on them. For example, the attribute خُسَّ very clearly directs our attention to their rising and setting. The purpose of mentioning this attribute is to point to the fact that the foolish have only given importance to the rising of these heavenly bodies and have made them their deities whereas they should also have witnessed their setting which is a very clear evidence of their subservience to a superior being.

Similarly, in the expression الجَوَارِي الكُتَّس there is a subtle reference to the movement of stars as they chase away the devils. When the latter try to eavesdrop, they are struck by these stars; it is as if a burst of lightning emerges like an arrow and after reaching its destination hides back in its bow.

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسْعَسَ (١٧) وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا تَنَفَّسَ (١٨) ¹⁷

This is another oath which bears witness from another angle to the premise mentioned.

The word عَسْعَسَ has two meanings: “to turn dark” as well “to withdraw and to pass away”. Although the verse can be interpreted in the light of both these meanings, I have given preference to the second of these meanings. The reason is that this same oath is mentioned in this same context with slight change of words in the verses of Sūrah Muddaththir thus:

وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا أَسْفَرَ وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا أَدْبَرَ (٧٤: ٣٣-٣٤)

And the night bears witness when it turned its back and the morning when it is unveiled. (74:33-34)

In these verses also, the certainty of the Qur’ān’s warnings about the Hereafter is substantiated and in the verses under discussion as well, as will be shown, it is this premise which has been substantiated.

The word تَنَفَّسَ connotes the appearance of dawn but there is a special subtlety in this usage which is not hidden from the connoisseurs of the language. This word gives the impression that the dawn is burdened with the weight of the night in such a manner as if it is gasping for breath and it is the Almighty which lifts this heavy quilt from it and it is able to breathe and lift its head.

17. By the night as it retreats and the dawn when it breathes.

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ (١٩)¹⁸

This verse is the *muqṣam* 'alayh or the premise which is substantiated by the two aforementioned oaths. The word "messenger" here refers to Gabriel. The attributes which are subsequently mentioned and which shall be explained show that these attributes can only be for Gabriel.

What is stated in this verse is repeated in a negative manner in verse twenty five ahead: وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ (and this is not the utterance of an accursed devil). From this repetition also becomes evident the real stress of the word كَرِيمٍ. The implication is that unfortunate are the people who regard this Qur'ān to be a claptrap of the soothsayers and call the Prophet of God a soothsayer. Whatever soothsayers present is from the devils and there is no truth in it. They claim to have knowledge of the world beyond; however, their devils are so accursed in the eyes of God that they are pelted with shooting stars if they try to eavesdrop what to speak of having access to that world. On the contrary, the Book which is being recited to them has been brought by a Messenger of God who commands great respect in God's presence and is very honourable and favoured.

ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ (٢٠) مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ (٢١)¹⁹

More attributes of Gabriel are mentioned here so that it becomes evident that the Qur'ān has been revealed in a very safe, secure and pure manner and it also becomes evident in contrast the means through which the soothsayers receive the knowledge they boast. The Almighty has blessed him with such strong and sound characteristics that devilish forces cannot overawe, overpower or influence him. They cannot cause any hindrance in the duties assigned to him or pinch something from him or deceive him. He implements the directives of the Almighty with full diligence and authority because he is held high and favoured in the presence of God. He has direct access to the Almighty. No one else can come between him and God. In Sūrah Najm, this quality of Gabriel is mentioned by the words شَدِيدُ الْقُوَى (strong) and ذُو مِرَّةٍ (powerful) and I have explained them there.

The word مُطَاعٍ refers to the fact that the spirits and angels which are subservient to Gabriel obey him without questioning him; they dare not deviate from his directives in the slightest manner or take a step without his permission or make any changes in his directives or connive with the devils.

18. That this is the word brought by a noble messenger.

19. He is endued with great power and held in honour before the Lord of the Throne. He is obeyed and is also very trustworthy.

A study of classical Arabic literature shows that there is a great difference between the usage of *ثُمَّ* and *ثُمَّ*. The word *ثُمَّ* is used for specifically pointing towards something and is also used before an attribute to emphasize it. For example in (٦٤:٢٦) وَأَرْزَلْنَاهُمْ الْآخِرِينَ if the translation of this verse is done giving due consideration to *ثُمَّ* then it should be: “At that very place, We also brought others.” The implication being that the very path on which the Almighty saved the Israelites, He brought the Pharaoh and his people to that very path in order to drown them.

This word also occurs in Sūrah Dahr thus: وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ ثَمَّ رَأَيْتَ نَعِيمًا وَمُلْكًا كَبِيرًا (٢٠:٧٦). A faithful translation of this verse would read: “Wherever you look, you will see a great favour and a great kingdom.” Similarly, when this word occurs before an attribute, it is meant to highlight the grandeur and importance of that attribute. Here it has come right before the attribute “trustworthy” and hence the purpose is to underscore this attribute of Gabriel. In other words, besides the qualities mentioned in these verses, the attribute of trustworthiness is meant to be specifically emphasized.

The reason that this attribute is mentioned with such stress is that it is this attribute which ensures that whatever Gabriel brings from God to the Prophet (sws) is absolutely free of any alteration and is presented in its original form. On the other hand, the knowledge of the soothsayers is based on the jinn which are thieves and muggers. In the first place, they are not able to reach the world beyond and if they are able to pinch something it is an absolute falsity to which they add more falsity and then inspire it to their soothsayers. Moreover, these soothsayers are also great liars. They too exaggerate and inflate trivialities. In other words, what is implied by these verses is that this stagnated water from the soothsayers has no relation to the pure fountain from which the messengers of God receive water.

²⁰ وَمَا صَاحِبُكُمْ بِمَجْنُونٍ (٢٢)

After explaining the purity of the fountain from which the Prophet (sws) receives knowledge, here in this verse the leaders of the Quraysh are addressed that if their companion, Muḥammad (sws), claims that the Almighty has deputed him to warn them and whatever he is reciting out to them is the message of God which His most favoured angel has brought down to him, then they should not regard this message to be something inspired by madness or insanity; on the contrary, it is a truth from God.

Here the word *صَاحِبُكُمْ* (your companion) carries great eloquence. The implication is that he is not an unknown person to them; he was born and

20. And this companion of yours is not one possessed.

brought up among them and till now has lived each and every phase of his life among them; each one of them is a witness to his decency, sobriety, solemnity, chastity, veracity and trustworthiness. If his urging and counsel is weighing down heavily upon them, they should dispassionately reflect on what he is saying keeping in view his hitherto character rather than regarding him to be a madman or a soothsayer.

وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأُفُقِ الْمُبِينِ (٢٣)²¹

The verse highlights the fact that if the Prophet (sws) claims that he has seen the angel who brings the revelations to him, then this is not a false claim or a delusion; it is an absolutely true claim. He, in fact, has seen the angel in the clear and open horizon. The words *الْأُفُقِ الْمُبِينِ* refer to the expansive space which is before one's eyes and which one can observe clearly with the naked eye. In Sūrah Najm, the words *الْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَى* (the uppermost horizon) has been used for it:

عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَى ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَى وَهُوَ بِالْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَى ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّى فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَى فَأَوْحَى إِلَى عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَى مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَى أَفَتُمَارُونَهُ عَلَى مَا يَرَى (٥٣: ٥-١٢)

He is taught by one who is strong and powerful. He stood straight even though he was on the uppermost horizon; then drew near and came down within two bows' length or even closer. Then God revealed to His servant that which He revealed. His own heart did not deny his vision. So do you people fight with him on what he sees? (53:5-12)

The reader is advised to read the *tafsīr* of these verses. Referred in them are the experiences the Prophet (sws) went through when divine revelation began. When he mentioned these experiences before his people they got after him and made up various tales to refute him. Some regarded these experiences to be Satanic inspirations and others hallucinations. It is such people who are addressed in this verse and told that if the Prophet (sws) claims to have met the angel, then this is neither a hallucination nor an illusion; it is an indubitable observation seen in the open horizon.

وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ (٢٤)²²

The implication of this verse is that like the soothsayers, the Prophet

21. And he saw him in the clear horizon.

22. And he is not avaricious for the Unseen

(sws) of God has no greed for the unseen: he does not regard whatever notion that springs in his heart to be the truth and thereby claim to have access to the unseen. Like the soothsayers, he is not a source of misleading people. The revelation he presents before the disbelievers comes to him through an involuntary process. Their soothsayers indulge in all sorts of ploys to gain access to the world beyond and it is on such activities that their business flourishes and if they are not able to lay hands on the truth, they sell falsehood; on the other hand, these disbelievers know well that their companion has never gone after such things. Whatever he is presenting to them is not a display of fortune-telling or an excuse to extort money; on the contrary, his whole effort is involuntary and unintentional.

Generally, the word صَنِينٌ has been translated as “stingy”; however, I have translated it as “avaricious”. As both stinginess and avarice always co-exist, the difference in this translation is very slight. My preference stems from the fact that when the word صَنَّ means “stinginess” it comes with the preposition ب. Here the preposition عَلَى is used which indicates that it encompasses the meaning of avarice.

23 وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ (٢٥)

What is stated in verse nineteen as: إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ (that this is the word brought by a noble messenger) is emphasized here negatively: it is not the utterance of an accursed devil which is revealed to their soothsayers.

The word رَجِيمٍ is used in contrast to كَرِيمٍ. The implication is that the angel who comes to Muḥammad (sws) is a noble angel and the devils who come to their soothsayers are accursed. The word رَجِيمٍ means “he who is stoned.” I have already indicated earlier that devils who try to eavesdrop to gain knowledge from the world beyond are pelted with stones through shooting stars; for this reason, these devils are mentioned with their permanent attribute of رَجِيمٍ.

24 فَأَيْنَ تَذْهَبُونَ (٢٦)

This is an expression of amazement at the stubbornness and poor choice of the disbelievers. What comparison does as lofty a discourse as the Qur’ān have with the nonsensical concoctions of the soothsayers. Where is their crazy obduracy leading them to that they are not able to distinguish a pearl from a pebble.

23. And this is not the utterance of an accursed devil.

24. Whither then are you going?

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ (٢٧) لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَسْتَقِيمَ (٢٨)²⁵

Here, at the end of the *sūrah*, these verses sound a very effective warning: the Qur'ān is the forewarner to a day which is bound to come and from which no one can escape. If the disbelievers follow the path outlined by the Qur'ān, they will only themselves stand to gain and it will be no favour of theirs to others. They should also remember the fact that to accept or reject it is their responsibility and not that of God and His Prophet (sws) to force it upon them; therefore, he who wants to adopt the straight path should do so; otherwise, he should get prepared to face the consequences in the Hereafter.

وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٢٩)²⁶

Mentioned in this verse is the divine law of guidance: The Almighty produces the will to seek guidance only in those who want to receive guidance and use their abilities for this purpose. He lets people wander in darkness who spend their lives turning blind and deaf to guidance. I have explained this law at various places in this *tafsīr*. In the last verses of Sūrah Muddaththir too this law has been explained. Those who want to study it in detail may look it up.

With the grace of God, I come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*. فالحمد لله
(praise and gratitude be to God for His favour)

Rahmānābād,

17th July, 1979 AD

21st Shā'bān, 1399 AH

25. This is nothing but a reminder to the people of the world. For he among you who intends to adopt the right path.

26. And you will not intend unless the Lord of the worlds intends.